

# **Moses: A Biography of Meekness**

Galatians 5:23; Numbers 12:3

March 22, 2015

Greg L. Price

Solomon is identified by the Spirit of God as being the wisest mere man that ever lived, and Moses is heralded in Holy Scripture as the meekest mere man upon the face of the earth (at least up to that time in history). What a great help and encouragement to us that the Lord not only describes the characteristics and nature of meekness (as we saw in the previous sermon), but also puts flesh and sinew upon the skeleton of meekness so that we may see it actually lived out in the life of one so characterized by the fruit of meekness. The Lord not only commands us to bear the fruit of the Spirit, but also gives us real life object lessons and examples in His Word to further impress upon us how the fruit of the Spirit grows in the life of the Christian.

Let us investigate today this most amazing man that God raised up to deliver His people out of 400 years of Egyptian bondage—a man characterized by meekness—Moses. The main points for the sermon this Lord's Day are: (1) A Brief Background to the Life of Moses; (2) The Meekness of Moses Grows out of Great Trial (Numbers 12:1-2); (3) The Meekness of Moses is Strength Under Control (Numbers 12:3-13).

## **I. A Brief Background to the Life of Moses.**

A. In order to have a better understanding into the meekness of Moses, let us go back in time, many years before the incident we find recorded here in Numbers 12.

- B. Moses was born at a time of great trial for God's people, Israel.
1. After the time of Joseph (who had been exalted to second

in command in Egypt and had brought his father, Jacob, and his brothers and their families from Canaan to Egypt to be saved during a time of great famine), there arose a Pharaoh in Egypt who knew not Joseph, but saw in Israel a threat to Egypt; for the descendants of Jacob were vast growing multitudes of people in the land of Egypt. There was then hatched a wicked policy to make Israel serve the interests of Egypt by means of bringing them into bondage and using their forced labor to build cities and other great projects.

2. Israel multiplied to the extent that their sheer numbers so frightened Pharaoh that they began a systematic program of murdering the newborn male children (this was no doubt also to instill fear in the parents so that they would by means of contraception not even bring children into the world). The parents of Moses feared the Lord more than Pharaoh and not only would not use contraception, but preserved their son by building a floatable, sealed basket into which they placed their infant son and entrusted him to the Lord to protect him. In God's good providence, Moses was rescued and was adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh, but was nursed and taught by his own Israelite mother in the one true religion.

C. When Moses (now a prince in Egypt) was 40 years of age, he saw a fellow Israelite being mercilessly beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster. Moses intervened and slew the Egyptian, but had to flee when he was exposed and identified.

1. He fled to the land of Midian and was there for 40 years, having married and having become one who tended sheep in that wilderness land. Having thought that God would make him Israel's deliverer while still in Egypt by means of his own princely power and strength, he now found himself greatly humbled, living not in royal palaces or reigning over men, but living in lowly tents and reigning over sheep. Before Moses could be Israel's deliverer, he must first be made

lowly-minded, deprived of his own power, taught to wait upon the Lord, and trained in humble service of the Lord for 40 years.

2. He was now 80 years old when the Lord appeared to him in the burning bush, and gave him his commission to deliver Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The first words of Moses when God called to him at the burning bush were “Here am I” (Exodus 3:4), but the second words of Moses when called him to deliver His people Israel were “Who am I” (Exodus 3:11). There was no leaping at the chance to be eminent in power, and no grasping at the chance of fame. In fact, Moses had to be constrained along the path of God's appointment by the Lord, not because of a disobedient spirit in Moses, but because of a lowly estimate of himself.

3. Dear ones, the Lord delights to take those who see themselves like a lowly Moses, like a lowly Gideon and his 300, like a lowly David before Goliath, like a lowly Paul who said when he was weak, then was he strong (i.e. when he saw himself as weak in himself, then he saw the power of God working in him, 2 Corinthians 12). Meekness instills within the Christian that without Christ you can do nothing (John 15:5), but you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13). The Lord had accomplished his work in the life of Moses, for Moses did not see himself as having the requisite gifts to be Israel's deliverer. He claimed he was not an articulate speaker; he was not a leader of men. In fact, he tried to pass the job off to his brother, Aaron.

3. But you see, dear ones, this was the work of God's Spirit growing in Moses the fruit of meekness; for meekness is antithetical to pride, self-sufficiency, and boasting in one's own strength, abilities, education, knowledge, or wealth. The fruit of meekness is being humbled before the Lord, and looking to God's power (not one's own) in order to serve the Lord and others (Zechariah 4:6).

D. We next see this Moses armed with the fruit of meekness, standing courageously before the most powerful ruler in the world at that time, demanding in God's name that Pharaoh release Israel from bondage.

1. The Lord sends 10 miraculous plagues, using Moses as His mouthpiece before Pharaoh. Anyone who could stand up to the proud and imposing Pharaoh was not a wimp or a weakling. Moses submitted to God's bridle on him, and the Lord led him with a meekness and submission to the Lord that was characterized by courage. Oh, how we hate the bridles and bits of the Lord in our lives. But that is the way of meekness. Moses feared Pharaoh so little because he feared God so much. That is the courage of meekness.

2. Moses led God's people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea on dry ground by the power of God. Moses must have been some leader, for this was not a trained army that he was leading, but was rather thousands and thousands of families of former slaves (according to Exodus 12:37, there were 600,000 men alone, not counting women and children—so we are looking at least 2-3 million people).

E. Moses might have believed that after the 10 plagues and the miraculous crossing through the Red Sea that the worst of the trials, hardships, and problems were over (or at least were diminishing), but as he soon learned, they were greatly about to increase, as the care, provision, and administrative supervision of these millions of complaining, discontented, unbelieving people weighed so heavily upon the heart of Moses—even to the point that he cried out to the Lord that he could not go on without help and grace (Numbers 11:11).

1. On more than one occasion Moses intervened on behalf of Israel against the fierce anger of the Lord for their sin (the golden calf—Exodus 32:9-12; the 12 spies—Numbers 14:11-12,15-21; and the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—Numbers 16:41-48).

2. Until the end of his life, Moses led the children of Israel for forty long years, going in circles in a barren wilderness because the people were constantly and consistently rebelling and complaining. They threatened Moses and blamed him and God for every trial that came their way. However, these trials were sent into their lives by God to humble them, to grow them in meekness, but they stubbornly refused the bit and bridle of the Lord.

3. What about you, dear brothers and sisters? Are you resisting and despising God's bit and bridle in your life? O, how we are wild horses who want to be free to do what we want to do because we want to do it. However, we all need to be broken, in order to be tamed in meekness and useful to the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that the Hebrew word for meekness is derived from the word for affliction. Are you just becoming angry and frustrated at the trials in your marriage, at work, and in the temptations you face, or are you (by God's grace) growing the fruit of meekness out of those afflictions, hardships, and temptations?

4. Moses had to be the meekest man on earth (prior to Christ) to continue to intercede for the wicked, faithless, and ungrateful people of God, who wanted to go back to their servitude in Egypt. In these and like cases, the meekness of Moses was revealed in his humility, his gentleness, his unselfish service for God's glory, not repaying evil for evil, his interceding for the people, and his greater concern for the glory of God than for the hardship, heartache, and pain that they brought to his heart.

## **II. The Meekness of Moses Grows out of Great Trial (Numbers 12:1-2).**

A. As we now turn to Numbers 12, we are shown by the Lord the context in which Moses is declared to be very meek. In some ways, this was even a greater trial than he had faced up to that point from the

millions of people who turned against him, because this trial was brought against him by those close to him—his sister, Miriam, and his brother, Aaron. It is one thing to be betrayed by those distant from you, but, O, the heartache and even anger that wells up within us to be betrayed by those near and close to us (it is such times that the prophet Micah has in view in Micah 7:5-7).

B. It would appear that the stated complaint of Miriam and Aaron against Moses was that he had married an Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12:1), but that the real complaint against Moses was that they resented the place of leadership he had in Israel (Numbers 12:2). Let's look at these complaints more closely.

1. **The stated complaint.** The Ethiopian woman he married here was likely not his first wife, Zipporah. It is possible that Zipporah had died, though her death is not specifically recorded in Scripture.

a. The words, "for he had married an Ethiopian (or Cushite) woman," most naturally point to some recent event, not to one which had taken place more than 40 years previously, and which is, therefore, very unlikely to have given occasion to the murmuring of Miriam and Aaron at this time. Why his marriage to Zipporah would become an issue after 40 years seems very strange indeed, if this refers to his marriage to Zipporah.

b. The word, "Ethiopian" (or Cushite) is associated with that nation that lies south of Egypt and is known for its dark complexion (Jeremiah 13:23). Here was a Gentile convert to the one true religion. This is what many would today would call an interracial marriage (though I would not choose to use that language, because I do not believe the Bible speaks of different races, but only of one race—the human race—Adam's race—Acts 17:26—Paul calls them various "nations", not races). Not only does God not disapprove of Moses' marriage to this Ethiopian convert, it is Miriam and Aaron that fall under the holy disapproval of the

Lord. Although the marriage of Moses is the stated complaint, the real complaint surfaces in the next verse.

2. **The real complaint.** Miriam and Aaron were jealous of the place that God had appointed him as being His chief mouthpiece and leader in Israel (Numbers 12:2). It is not as though Aaron and Miriam had no significant place of service in Israel. Aaron was also a prophet (Exodus 4) and Miriam was a prophetess (Exodus 15:20). Yet that was apparently not good enough, they were jealous that God spoke primarily through Moses in a “mouth to mouth” (clear and intimate) relationship (Numbers 12:8).

a. It would appear that the oldest child in the family, Miriam, was the primary instigator of this jealousy against her younger brother, Moses. Her name occurs before that of Aaron (Numbers 12:1), as the more prominent subject; and the verb which is rendered “spake” (Numbers 12:1) is in the feminine gender (in the Hebrew text). Moreover, the severe discipline that followed was fell upon Miriam, not upon Aaron (Numbers 12:10). Aaron was certainly complicit in this jealous rant against Moses, but the Lord looked upon Miriam’s role as instigating this revolt of jealousy against Moses. Aaron was not meek in this case in standing up to his sister, but was rather weak (just as he was when the people pressured him to build a golden calf). Meekness is not weakness.

b. Meekness is not jealous of the gifts and graces of others, as were Miriam and Aaron. They did not like playing second fiddle to Moses (after all he was their baby brother). They coveted his place of leadership (as did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in Numbers 16)—they thought they should all be equal (egalitarianism). However, as we shall see, they were not ultimately complaining against Moses, but against the Lord God himself who had appointed Moses to that position (“And the LORD heard it” Numbers 12:2).

c. Dear ones, how much of our gossip and critical spirit of others is simply jealousy against others? We either want to put others

down to our level or exalt ourselves to their level. The fruit of meekness does not get caught up in being a Miriam in instigating jealous gossip, nor does it listen and join in with jealous gossip as did Aaron. This is the surest way to bring dissension and disunity into the family, the church, or the workplace. Dear ones, you will not grow in the fruit of meekness if you instigate or participate in such jealous and covetous criticism of others. This must like other sinful habits that we have be taken to the cross to be crucified, rather than indulging ourselves in it (Proverbs 6:16-19).

d. Miriam and Aaron's first stated issue was their opposition to the Gentile wife of Moses. But their real issue was jealousy over Moses' position. How often does this occur: the stated complaint is a doctrine or practice, but soon after, it becomes apparent that the real issue is their jealousy for power and control within the church (or a selfish desire to be lifted up in the eyes of others)?

e. This jealousy of Miriam and Aaron over the Ethiopian woman that Moses took as a wife is a fit picture also of the jealousy that Israel manifested toward the Gentiles who were joined in covenant with Christ as their heavenly Husband (Romans 11:11). Let us not show the same jealousy toward the gifts and graces of others (in the home, at work, in the classroom, or in the church), lest we receive God's severe discipline as did Miriam and Aaron. Let us grow in the meekness of Moses, who said: "Would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets" (Numbers 11:29).

### **III. The Meekness of Moses is Strength under Control (Numbers 12:3-13).**

A. This section begins with the statement about the meekness of Moses, and then it proceeds to demonstrate in a very particular way the meekness of Moses.



1. It is often wondered whether this is the statement of Moses about himself, or if this is a statement added by Joshua, an inspired prophet and successor to Moses.

a. Although we cannot be certain, let me say that if God so impressed Moses to make this statement about himself, it is the Word of God to us and does not contradict the humility of Moses. This is not a warrant for us to boast and brag about our gifts, talents, resources, or accomplishments, justifying it by saying, “If Moses can do it, so can I. It’s not bragging if it is true.” It is bragging even if it is true (Proverbs 27:2—it was God that was praising Moses, not Moses that was praising Moses). If Moses penned this, he did so without boasting and did so under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

b. But it might also be true that this was a statement added by the inspired writer Joshua, who likely also added what we find at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy concerning the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:7-12).

2. The meekness of Moses has been observed throughout this sermon from the time he fled Egypt, was a shepherd for 40 years in Midian, returned to deliver Israel from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and led them for 40 years in the wilderness. What characterized the meekness of Moses was his humility, his gentleness when offended, his contentment in serving the Lord whether in a low place or in a high place, and his courage in fearing God more than he feared any man. Out of affliction, pain, and hardship grew meekness—a strength under the control of the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 11:24-27).

B. Very briefly we note in the following verses that God brought leprosy upon Miriam for her role in jealously attacking Moses, God’s faithful servant. But it is the reaction of Moses that particularly displays once again the fruit of meekness in his life.

1. Moses interceded for Miriam and Aaron, rather than

gloating in the words of praise just given to him by the Lord in the presence of Miriam and Aaron (Numbers 12:13). Moses was more concerned for the glory of God and more concerned to pray for and help those who attacked him than he was to get even, than he was to take a pound of their flesh, than he was to exalt himself over them.

2. There is no doubt that Miriam deserved this severe judgment from the Lord for her grievous sin in attacking not only Moses but ultimately attacking the Lord God Himself for having appointed Moses to that leadership position. And though God did chasten Miriam, Moses (like Christ) cried out as her intercessor that the Lord might have mercy upon her (Hebrews 7:25). That, dear ones, is meekness in action. Not exalting oneself, but lowering oneself to minister to others (even when they have hurt, despised, attacked, and maligned you).

From the example of Moses, we learn that meekness is characterized by being a servant of God and a servant of men. Moses (like the greater Moses, the Lord Jesus Christ) came not to be served, but to serve others and to give his life for others. The service of Christ was not a begrudging service, but was a loving and thankful service, knowing full well, that if He had not in meekness and lowliness come as a servant to bear God's condemnation for sin, we would all have fallen under that righteous judgment of God for all eternity (2 Corinthians 5:21). Dear ones, the meekness of Moses is our example. The meekness of Christ is our salvation. Come with all your leprosy of sin and cast it upon Christ who will heal you and bring you into the camp of fellowship and communion with God. Amen.

Copyright 2015 Greg L. Price. Distributed by Still Waters Revival Books (<http://www.puritandownloads.com>) by permission of the author, Greg L. Price. More free online written Reformation resources by Greg Price (John Calvin, John Knox, Samuel Rutherford, et al.) are at <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/newslett.htm> and more free audio (MP3) Reformation resources by Greg Price (and many other Puritans, Covenanters, and Reformers) are at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/go/699> or at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/swrb>.